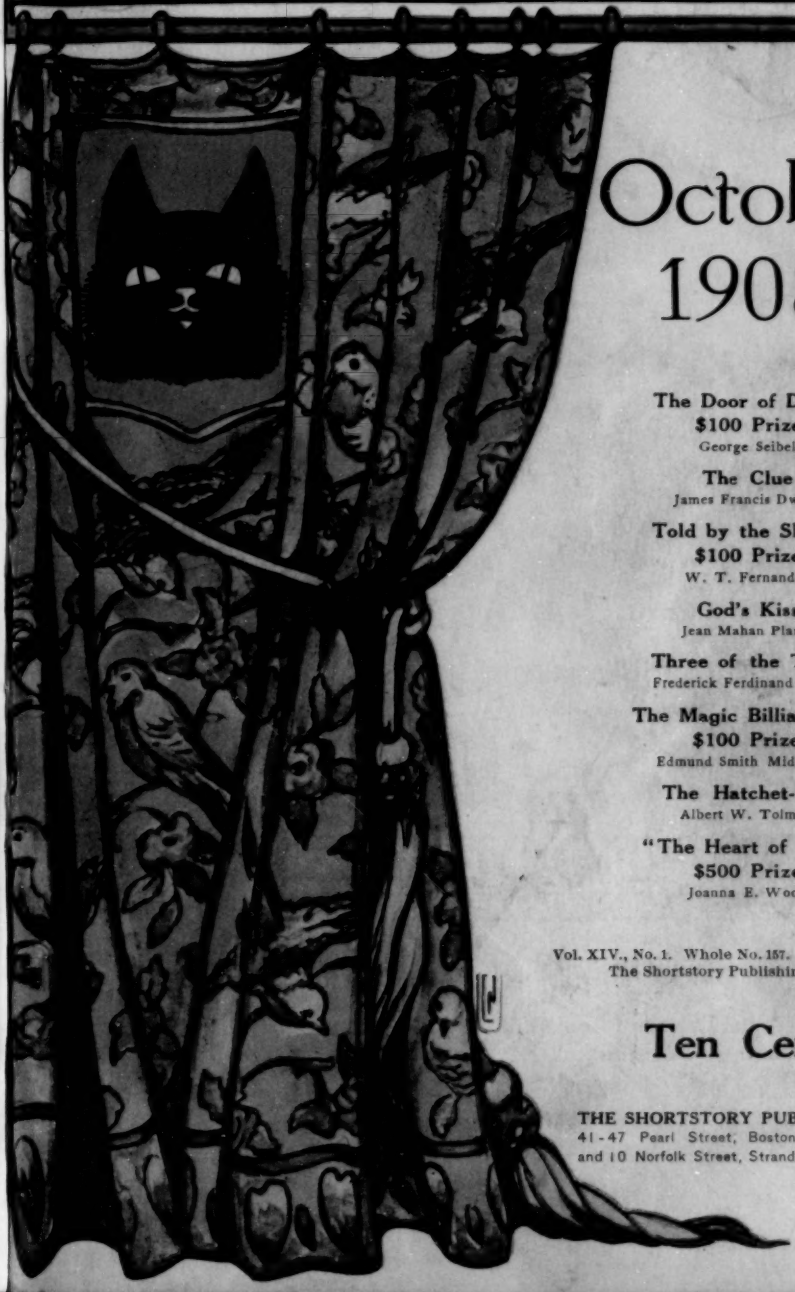
NO TITLE-PAGE & INDEX ISSUED

The Black Cat



812
724

October 1908

The Door of Death
$100 Prize
George Seibel

The Clue
James Francis Dwyer

Told by the Sheriff
$100 Prize
W. T. Fernandez

God's Kiss
Jean Mahan Plank

Three of the Third
Frederick Ferdinand Moore

The Magic Billiard Ball
$100 Prize
Edmund Smith Middleton

The Hatchet-Boy
Albert W. Tolman

"The Heart of God"
$500 Prize
Joanna E. Wood

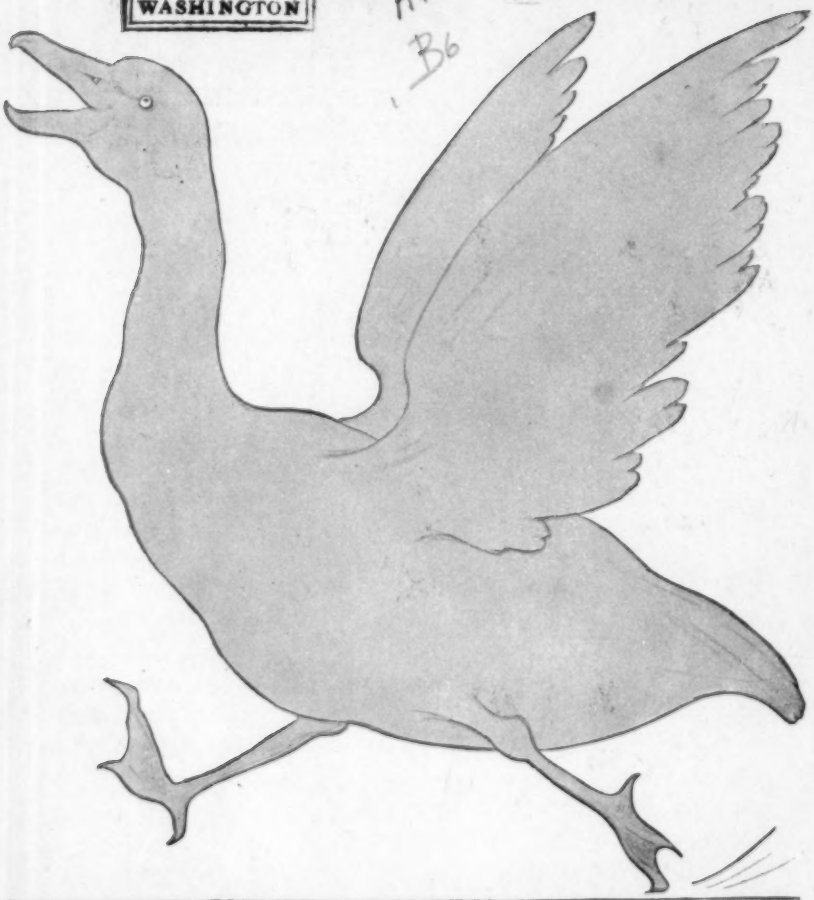
Vol. XIV., No. 1. Whole No. 157. Copyright, 1908, by The Shortstory Publishing Company

Ten Cents

THE SHORTSTORY PUBLISHING CO.
41-47 Pearl Street, Boston, Massachusetts
and 10 Norfolk Street, Strand, London, W. C.

THE LIBRARY
OF CONGRESS
WASHINGTON

AP2
B6



HOW FOOLISH IT IS
TO WASTE NEEDED ENERGY WHEN
SAPOLIO
CLEANS SCOURS POLISHES

LIBRARY of CONGRESS
Two Copies Received
SEP 18 1908
Sept. 17, 1908.
CLASS B XXc. No.
17105
COPY B.

The Black Cat

A Monthly Magazine of Original Short Stories.

Copyright, 1908, by The Shortstory Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

Vol. XIV., No. 1.
Whole No., 157.

OCTOBER, 1908.

10 cents a copy.
$1.00 a year.

Entered at the Post-Office at Boston, Mass., as second-class matter.

THE BLACK CAT is devoted to original, unusual, fascinating stories — every number is complete in itself. It publishes no serials, translations, borrowings, or stealings. It pays nothing for the name or reputation of a writer, but the highest price on record for *Stories that are Stories*, and it pays not according to length, but according to strength. To receive attention, manuscripts must be sent flat, fully prepaid, and accompanied by addressed and stamped envelope for return. All MSS. are received and returned at their writers' risk.

CAUTION. — *The entire contents of* THE BLACK CAT *are protected by copyright, and publishers everywhere are cautioned against reproducing any of the matter, either wholly or in part.*

The Door of Death.*

BY GEORGE SEIBEL.

THE first hint of the fearful truth came to me a week ago, on the morning after I arrived at this hotel. I turned out of bed and groped toward the window, to open the blinds and let the gold of the morning pour in, when I stumbled against a cuspidor. And my foot, striking the porcelain, gave forth a metallic ring.

It startled me, but I thought no more of it just then. There was a dull pain in my head, and I raised the window, thinking the morning breeze might drive it away. They had told me that the fresh mountain air and the waters of the iron spring would make a new man of me. Ah, they had little thought, doctor and friends, what it would make of me!

I returned to my bedside, and knelt down to reach under it for my shoes. I always put my shoes under the bed, my watch in one shoe and my pocketbook in the other. No burglar would ever think of looking into a pair of shoes for valuables. As I stooped to reach under the bed, my eyes fell upon the place where I had lain. There was the depression made by my body, but it bore no manner of resemblance to the contour of a human body—

*Copyright, 1908, by The Shortstory Publishing Company. Copyright secured in Great Britain. All rights reserved. The writer of this story received a cash prize of $100 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending October 12, 1904.

in fact, it looked very much more like the outline of a huge door-key.

I laughed, and said to myself that it was a play of shadows, an optical illusion caused by the beams of the morning sun slanting against the post of my bed. A crazy idea! Whoever heard of a bed-post casting a shadow like a door-key? If the water at the springs the other day had held in solution anything stronger than iron, I should have blamed it on the four glasses I had drunk. However, I determined to dismiss the matter from my mind — my head was drowsily aching without this new worry — so I brushed my hands over the sheets to smooth them out. It would create gossip if the chambermaid saw that the impression left by my body in the bed was not that of a human body at all, but rather resembled the outlines of a huge door-key.

Since then the fearful truth has slowly forced itself upon me, and, O God! I have been driven to every shift and expedient to keep the secret from becoming known. I have walked slowly and tiptoed in the corridors, lest the metallic impact of my feet upon the tiles should arouse suspicion. On the warmest days I have muffled myself in my greatcoat, to prevent spying eyes from wondering about the shape of my body. Despite these precautions the clerk and the porters look after me as I pass, and I am sure they suspect something. I dare not stop to talk to any of the other guests, not even to *her*, for fear my awful secret will become known.

Ah, if they knew — if *she* knew! The thought appals me; I feel the perspiration break out upon my brow; and, as I lift my hand to wipe it away, I feel that my brow is icy as iron.

It is the fault of the mineral spring water — of that I feel certain. The four glasses I drank soon after my arrival must have caused all this trouble. Though I know nothing of medicine, nor of the mysterious inter-actions of matter and mind and chemical reagents, I feel dimly certain that the particles of iron, entering my blood, have worked this transformation. The thought makes me faint — I stagger — I clutch the newel-post, for I must not fall. Meseems that, as I clatter down in the corridor, one of the bell-boys will pick me up and tell the clerk, "Some guest has dropped this." And then the secret would be out.

I can understand the transmutation of my bodily tissue into

metallic molecules. It is similar to the process of ossification by which a well-known museum freak was produced, analogous to the process of petrifaction by which whole forests have been turned into stone. But why this strange shape? Why not retain my human semblance? What mad prank have the mysterious powers of the mind played with my body? I remember, before lying down on the bed that night, the door-key was the last tangible object of my thoughts. I rose to see whether I had locked the door. Then, as I lay down again, the key, huge and luminous, seemed to hang over my bed. As I fell asleep, its bow seemed to press coldly upon my forehead.

I dread discovery. What will become of me? Perhaps, like the Ossified Man, I shall become the prey of some dime museum manager. I can see the flaring canvas painted with the accursèd shape; I can hear the lecturer invite the gaping crowd to "Come in and see the Human Door-key! Only a dime!"

It is in vain to think jestingly of the matter in this strain, as I have tried to do. I have said to myself, "Be grateful you are not turned into an umbrella, for then you would tremble continually in dread of being stolen. Be grateful you are not turned into a Venetian glass vase, for then you would shiver in perpetual apprehension of being broken. Be grateful you are not turned into a pump, for if you met a friend, and he shook your hand vigorously, a stream of clear cold water gushing from your mouth would betray your secret at once."

Indeed, I am sincerely grateful that it is no worse. And grateful, too, that *she* does not suspect. If she knew, she would no longer smile at me, even her mournful smile. What would she say?

And what would the hotel manager say if he knew — especially if he knew the full import of this mysterious transformation? Only yesterday this import dawned fully upon me. It is weird — it is positively uncanny. There is a kind of escritoire in my room, and it is locked. I had decided to write the doctor about my queer sensations, especially about the flattened feeling in my head, and I stood before the escritoire wondering how I should open it. By some subtle suggestion, coming I know not whence, I was moved to bend my aching head forward and lean it against

the door of the desk. As I did so, my head instantaneously passed into the keyhole, I wrenched about in quick alarm, and the door sprang open.

It seems that the metallic molecules of my strangely shapen body are still in a state of fluxion, and conform at once to the bolts and tumblers of any lock. It is a gruesome thought — *I am a key that opens any door!*

If the police should learn of it! They would apprehend me at once. It would be thought dangerous to leave me at large, for suppose I should avail myself of my weird power and become a burglar! Ho, ye money-bags, what would your double doors and triple locks avail you? Your strong-boxes would open at a twist of my head. I could walk into jewelry stores at night, and help myself to trays of rings and watches. When people would leave on their summer vacations, I could enter their houses and ransack the drawers of desks and bureaus. I could penetrate with ease to the treasure chambers of gold-hoarding kings, or to the harems of uxorious sultans. I certainly could not blame the police for placing me under arrest if they discovered this strange power to be mine. But I do not fear them —prison doors would open to let me out as easily as any door in this hotel would open to let me in.

It seems that the same state of fluxion which prevents the metallic molecules of my body from solidifying in the form of the key, still keeps the people I meet from guessing my dread secret. I am hovering, as it were, between the two shapes — like a disembodied spirit uncertain which form to assume. O God, 'tis well that no one knows! What would *she* say if she came up to look into my eyes, and looked instead through the bow of a key into space?

Can she suspect anything? Is she here by some collusion with the doctor who recommended me to come hither? Sometimes I think so —for she acts strangely. We were affianced, yet she barely notices my presence, nods to me distantly, though pleasantly, seems to avoid me as I avoid her. Last evening, when I followed her up the hotel stairs, my feet clicking clearly upon the tiles, she walked faster until she fairly flew across the upper corridor; then I heard her turn the key in the door of her room. Ah,

if she knew how little avails the locking of doors against me! I need only press my head into the keyhole and give one wrench; the most complicated lock would fly open instantly. What would the Prisoner of Chillon not have given to possess this power? Or Ugolino in the Tower of Famine? Or M. de Beaufort in Mazarin's prison? Or Galileo in the carcer of the Inquisition? Or the thousands that have been cast helpless into the Bastilles and Chateaux d'If of the world? By them this inexplicable transformation, this perplexing gift, would have been welcomed as a blessing, as a divine interposition like in the case of Paul and Silas in the dungeon at Philippi. To me it comes as a cruel curse, an affliction little short of death.

It were easier to bear if I could make the remotest use of it. But what use could I make of it? I am qualified only to become a traveling locksmith or a burglar's first assistant. I should prove a valuable helper to some midnight marauder, for I could tell him that hotel guests occasionally put their valuables into their shoes, which they stand just under the bed, at the foot.

Perhaps I might turn my gift to use in a small way even here. And by doing so I might discover whether the people of the hotel suspect anything. I have seen them look curiously at my shadow as I crossed the lawn. I must keep out of the sunlight.

Approaching the clerk, I said hurriedly, in a casual manner:

"If — I suppose you sometimes do — if you should have occasion to break open any door or to force the lock of a trunk — "

"Sir," said he, and looked at me in a way that told me he divined what I meant to say.

"If you should," I continued, trying to feign a careless smile, "don't burst them open until you've called me." Then I leaned over and whispered into his ear, "I'll open them for you."

He looked after me in a way that left little doubt in my mind. He more than suspects my secret. It will require all my cunning to keep it from him. If it were not for my shadow!

Going up into my room I thought over this, though my head ached and throbbed. Throwing open the curtains, I looked at my shadow upon the wall. If any lingering doubt had remained in my mind as to the horrible truth, one glance now dispelled it. The shadow of my body was truly the shadow of a gigantic key. I

cannot go out any more unless I am muffled up past recognition — at any rate not in the daytime, nor in an unequally lighted room. I remember the story of a certain Peter Schlemihl, who sold his shadow and then wandered over the wide world in despair over his loss — how glad I should be to give my shadow away before it gives me away!

As I watched it upon the wall, flickering and fading with the motion of the wind-stirred curtain, another strange phenomenon arrested my attention. The bow of the key was where my head should have been; the stem of it formed my body; the bridge represented my feet. Now and again a sort of undulation or tremor shook the shadow, and I noted that the bow and the bridge had changed places. It is evidently another result of the state of fluxion in which I realize all the molecules of my body to be, and I suppose it will continue until the process of ferrification is completed. If I had drunk more of the iron water, doubtless by now I should be jingling on somebody's key-ring. I am like the paramecium, that elastic animalcule which projects limbs from its body whenever and wherever it requires them — hands to seize food or feet to kick foes. I am in a state of fluxion, unstable and undulating; I feel all through me the endosmosis and exosmosis of my dual elements — flesh and iron; this flexible, that rigid; the one human-like, the other key-shaped.

The thought is maddening. I would blow out my brains, but for two considerations. One is that a bullet fired at my head would pass harmlessly through the bow of the key, if the bow happened to be head at the time; if the bridge end chanced to be head, the bullet would fall flattened to the floor. The shot would attract attention, arouse suspicion, and suspicion is already rife. Of course, I might go and leap into the lake, being sure of sinking to the bottom, and no one would ever know what had become of me. But there I should lie under water, and rust, rust, rust. The idea is unbearable, for if I cannot help being a door-key, I at least do not wish to be a rusty one.

Besides, if I made an end of myself, what would *she* say? She loved me once — I believe she still loves me — we were affianced. Sometimes I think the doctor has sent her here to watch over me, and that she knows, for I have caught her eyes red as if with weep-

ing. Does she know? I must sound her — yet I must be careful lest she sound me, and discover that I sound like iron.

It must be done with tact. I hear her coming up the stairs now. I will easily cast her off the scent.

"Ah, Eleanor, you may have noticed that — that as I walk along this corridor my footfall clicks like — like metal."

"Well," she asked, and looked at me in a startled way.

"It's just because I have had my shoes soled and heeled with iron. I was afraid the dampness of the ground here, soaking through leather soles, might bring on rheumatism. It's very damp here — that is also the reason you see me always muffled up in my overcoat."

"Oh," she said, and began to edge away toward her door.

"Don't be afraid of me — stay — I wouldn't harm you if I could. Of course, the past is past — you believed the slanders of those who would make out that I wasn't quite right in my head — you believed them, and it's all over between us. But I love you still."

"Do not remind me of it," she said, shading her eyes with her hands, and retreating more rapidly toward her room.

"It is true — I love you still, love you madly. If there is anything I can do to show my love, call upon me to do it. Alas, it is little that lies in my power, but if — if, for instance, you should lose the key of your jewel casket, bring the casket to me. I'll open it for you — you understand?"

By this time she had reached the door of her room, and stood upon the threshold.

"Good-night!" she said, in a tone almost tearful, and shut the door in my face. I stood in consternation for a moment; I had not dreamed of such an affront, after I had been at great pains to express my devotion. I rapped upon the door and cried:

"Open and hear what I have to say. There was a time when you listened gladly to what I said. Open!"

"Go away," she cried, "Go to your room — sleep — compose yourself — that will be best for you."

"You must listen to me, you *must* open the door, or *I will.*" I said this with terrible emphasis, so that she could not help but understand my meaning.

"If, as you say, you love me still, go to your room," she said.

"I love you still," I repeated vehemently, "and *love laughs at locksmiths!* Open the door, or I will. I have a power to open doors more potent than the shoulder of Porthos."

"Go away — go to your room," she almost screamed.

"You suspect, but you do not know the extent of this power," I answered. "If I were Harpagon, no treasure would be secure from me. If I were Paul Pry, no secret could be locked up too tightly. If I were Don Juan, no haughty beauty's chamber door would bar my passion out."

"Go away," she shrieked. "I have rung for the porter. Go away!"

"You shall hear all I have to say," I cried in rage. "Before he comes I'll be at your side, and you must send him off again."

I stooped forward and pressed my head against the keyhole. It passed into the lock instantaneously, and I knew that I need but give one twist for the door to fly open. At that instant the porter came rushing up, in response to her ringing and her frantic cries, and seized me from behind. As I twisted my head in the lock he tugged — tugged like a demon. I felt my senses leaving me — strangulation, darkness, horror succeeded. He tugged and wrenched — I twisted and gasped. It is over — for suddenly I felt all human senses quitting my body, and I fell to the floor with a clang, just a common iron door-key.

I am dead. I, Martin Farringdon, am dead — I died at her door. The body that was mine is iron and shapen like a door-key. They have carried it into the room where I was, and laid it upon the bed. When day comes they will see that I am dead. And what is left of me will perhaps be hung upon a nail above the chimney-piece.

The Clue.*

BY JAMES FRANCIS DWYER.

IT was midnight. In Fifth Avenue there were few pedestrians, and so a fat man in evening dress, hurrying northward, attracted attention. Six night birds, who thought his actions mysterious, followed a few paces in the rear. Occasionally they questioned each other as they trotted briskly along, but the questions were put in the hopeless tone that the questioner uses when he knows the person questioned cannot supply the information he requires.

The fat man didn't speak. He moved at a smart jog trot, looking straight to the front and seemingly unaware of the fact that he was the cause of much conjecture. The mystery scented by the others was caused by the peculiar movements of his hands. His arms were outstretched, and his two hands revolved round each other like the hands of a fisherman hauling in a line. And the inquisitive ones in the rear were unable to explain this movement. It was not a dignified exercise for a fat man in evening dress, and their curiosity was justified.

At Thirty-second Street a policeman, dozing on the opposite side of the road, straightened himself as he saw the hurrying group coming towards him. Swinging his night stick he crossed over and waited the approach of the little procession. He was in charge of that neighborhood, and there should be an explanation.

The fat man passed the officer at a gallop. His hands were moving faster and faster, and the tails of his coat were sticking out like little black wings in his rear. The Law was a trifle astonished. As he stood looking after the leader of the hurrying squad, he was jostled by the inquisitive ones following, and he became annoyed. He grabbed a straw-hatted youth by the shoulder and questioned him.

* Copyright, 1908, by The Shortstory Publishing Company. Copyright secured in Great Britain. All rights reserved.

"What's the matter?" he cried.

"Search me," answered the questioned one. "Le'me go; I want to see what the ole guy is up to."

The policeman lost his temper. He was being treated with disrespect. A festive citizen was running a fool procession over his beat without giving him the least explanation! So he let go of the youth's shoulder and dashed madly after the man in evening dress.

"Here, what's the game?" he panted. "What sort of a stunt are you up to, anyhow?"

The fat man shook off the grip of the Law and ran faster than ever, his outstretched hands circling round each other like the arms of a windmill in a gale.

"Stoop down and I'll tell you," he gasped, as the officer made another effort to restrain him.

The evident respectability of the fat man made the policeman comply with the request, and bending his six-foot frame he ran alongside the other as he listened. The inquisitive mob, now numbering a score, gathered in close, but the nightstick described a circle and they backed into safety.

For nearly twenty yards the policeman ran with bent back. Then he straightened himself up and laughed loudly. "Good for you," he cried. "Sprint a little, or we may be too late." Then he started to run madly alongside the man with the windmill arms.

The curious ones were annoyed. They were taxpayers, and they did not think it right that the officer, who was their servant, should keep the solution of the mystery a secret. They growled angrily whenever the Law chuckled over the story that the fat man had whispered, but they followed at full speed. Late revellers joined the group, but when they asked the reason of the chase they were told to watch the movements of the leader's hands.

"Been doin' that all the way from Twenty-eighth street," gasped the early followers, proud in the possession of that much information. "He's told the cop a joke, an' now the hickory wielder is hittin' the trail with him."

At Forty-eighth street the policeman met the officer on the adjoining beat, and hooking him by the arm he whispered into his ear as he kept pace with the fat man. The new policeman guf-

fawed loudly, and again the angry crowd looked vainly for the humor that seemed apparent to the two guardians of the peace. The first policeman slackened speed, called out a friendly "Good luck" to the fat man, and then returned to his own beat, while his comrade trotted swiftly in his place.

The fat man swung east, down Fifty-third street, and new recruits joined the procession at every yard. But all thirsted vainly for information. Questions put by the newcomers were met with the one answer: "Don't know; look at his hands. Been twisting them round and round all the way from Twenty-eighth Street."

Crossing Third Avenue the fat man halted suddenly. He knelt down upon the car tracks, and the officer stooped beside him. The crowd pressed round till the swiftly swung nightstick swept them back. The man in evening dress crawled across the tracks and raked the ground with his fingers.

Presently he leapt to his feet and yelled out excitedly. "It's all right, officer," he cried, and once again his hands started to revolve round each other as he dashed towards the water.

Just here a third policeman was initiated into the mystery that was troubling the crowd, and with a merry laugh he took up a position by the side of the fat man. The crowd cursed collectively. Here was a mystery that had been explained three times to bulky policemen, yet they were kept in ignorance. It wasn't fair. They had a right to know why the man in evening dress was doing the windmill performance with his hands, and why that stunt amused the policeman. Much of their breath was exhausted in strange phrases denouncing the secrecy of the police, but they were determined to see the end.

Near Second Avenue a man standing on the sidewalk turned when he heard the noise of the charging squad and contemplated the runners. Then he stepped into the street and crossed over. The fat man chuckled. He whispered to the policeman at his right hand, and the officer dashed ahead. The man in front started to run, but his pursuer overhauled him in a dozen strides, and they rolled on the pavement.

"Wot's the matter?" gasped the captured one. "Wot are yer scruffin' me for?"

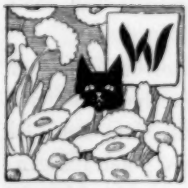
"This gentleman wants his rubber door-mat," murmured the policeman, relieving his captive of the parcel he carried beneath his arm.

"Hully Gee!" exclaimed the prisoner, rubbing his eyes and staring round him at the crowd. "Where did yer get the mob, an' how did yer know I had it, anyhow?"

"I had you on a string," explained the fat man, holding up a black thread in the light of the street lamp. "I've caught five men who have tried to steal that mat. It's attached to a thousand yards of strong thread, and as they generally grab it when the streets are quiet, the trail is always clear."

Told by the Sheriff.*

BY W. T. FERNANDEZ.



"HAT is it this time — rustlers?" asked the Doctor, as Sheriff Bill Jeffords, sun-browned, booted and spurred, a murderous .44 slung on each hip, flipped his sombrero on one chair and deposited himself in another.

"No — hold-up," answered Bill, stuffing a short pipe with cut plug. "That gang what held up the 'Overland' a few days ago. Had to chase 'em thirty miles into the hills before we could convince 'em they were our game, an' then had to plant three of 'em out there. The boys are fetchin' the other two, a little the worse for wear, down to the calaboose. Curious how things keep a comin' up after a fellow's almost forgotten 'em. A story'll begin in Texas an' wind up in Alaska, an' its mighty disturbin' to meet the son in Arizona of the fellow you had to hang in Montana, but it's a cussed small world an' I found it out again today for about the four hundred and fifty-fourth time, by comin' across a woman's picture on one of those gents we collared."

The Doctor pricked up his ears. The Sheriff's yarns were drawn from a varied experience as scout, cowboy and Indian fighter, and always showed, like a flash of summer lightning, a thread or two of the fibre that went to make up the men of the frontier. A terror to evil doers was Sheriff Bill, but he had never harmed a fallen man and never feared a strong one. Hurrying the completion of the prescription he was mixing, the physician sent his boy off to the patient's house with it, and suggested that the Sheriff fire away with his yarn.

"Well, Doc, as I said, when we searched the two gents, I come across a picture on one of 'em that took me back fifteen years, when I was a Captain of Rangers down in the Lone Star coun-

*Copyright, 1908, by The Shortstory Publishing Company. Copyright secured in Great Britain. All rights reserved. The writer of this story received a cash prize of $100.

try. Those were lively times, Doc, what with Injuns, rustlers an' Greasers, not to mention gangs of boozy cow punchers what'd tear into a town an' paw it up to see what made it grow an' shoot out all the mirrors in the swell gin emporium of the said town, it was lively, you bet. We were up against it good and plenty, an' the stunt of goin' into a cage of wild tigers would be easy compared to keepin' law an' order along the Rio Grande in the good old days.

"We'd just rounded up 'Red' Kelly an' his select bunch of horse lifters — by gettin' to the river a little sooner than they did — an' had turned back with the intention of takin' 'em into El Paso for trial before old man Hornby. He was a good hangin' judge, was Hornby, an' it made things look more regular, 'cause if you should happen to hang the wrong man, as sometimes happens in those horse cases, there'd be a howl; but if the honorable court hung the wrong man, it was into the calaboose for any one that put up a squeal, with Old Hornby on the bench, you could bet on that.

"We were hittin' the back trail at a lively clip when one of 'B's' Corporals held us up with word from the Major to swing up the river about ten miles an' help out a half-baked town located thereabouts. Smallpox an' the whole durned population down with it. 'Quarantine 'em and help 'em all you can,' was the Major's message.

"The first thing we raised on gettin' up to the town was a priest standin' on the steps of a little old-fashioned church. He was a tall, thin man, very weak lookin' an' although he couldn't have been over forty, his hair was as white as the snow caps on those hills over there. Holdin' up his hand for us to halt, he came toward us an' hailed me. 'How many men have you got what's had smallpox?'

"I put it up to the tribe, an' about five held up their hands. 'Let 'em come forward,' said the Padre, as if he was bossin' the whole show, instead of yours truly.

"'Just hold up a minute, your reverence,' said I, 'Tell me the conditions here an' with all due respect to yourself, I'll do the orderin'.' You see, Doc, I couldn't let a cassocked Padre come a-bossin' my rangers, me bein' a Methodist, — leastways I

was started that way, an' wound up by bein' Sheriff of this cussed county, which is worse. The Padre took it very quietly an' just said, 'I don't want to expose your whole force, Captain. A few men can render me enough help until the relief comes from El Paso.'

"'I'll give you fifteen,' I said, 'an' the rest of us will straighten up things in general a bit.' I put it up to the tribe for ten volunteers to go with the five that had been picked out first, an' told them to move one yard forward. The whole column moved forward, an' when the First Luff looked at them a moment later the column was as solid as before.

"'Well, damn my eyes!' he bawls, 'Ain't there a man in the whole bunch?' An' with his neck an' face the color of a turkey gobbler's comb, he reaches for a gun. 'Oh, shut up, Jim,' I said, 'They've all offered for the job.' That closed him out.

"The fifteen went off with the Padre, an' the rest of us got busy around the town. It only covered about an acre. We corralled some chickens an' soon had a chicken dinner with corn cakes an' coffee for the sick folks, an' mighty glad they was to get it, too. The Padre had tried to do the cookin', nursin', an' everything else, but it was a little too much for him.

"We'd pitched camp a short ways out of town an' shortly after we'd sent the grub in, I saw the Padre headed our way. As he came nearer he looked to be a mighty sick man. 'Got it,' says I to myself, as I started toward him. He waved me back, sayin' he'd just come from a sick bed, an' I might get the smallpox from him, but I wasn't worryin' about that, 'cause, you see, Doc, I'd taken a great shine to that Padre. From what the boys had told me when they came out for the grub, that man was a 'white' man all the way through, an' while I don't go much on 'sky pilots,' I'll take off my hat to the kind of 'sky pilot' he was in any county I meet him. It ain't the kind of pious talk a fellow puts out, Doc, but the way he lives it that keeps the herd straight, an' the Padre showed down — that's what he did. I just got to him in time to grab him as he collapsed. He was clean played out, an' bein' a sickly kind of man, was no way fitted to do all that he did do before he got word up to El Paso.

"I picked him up and carried him down to the creek an'

sprinkled water on his face, the First Luff fetched some chicken broth in a panniken an' hustled off to the medical chest — we did our own doctorin' in the Rangers in those days — for some whisky. I got a few drops down his throat an' in a few minutes he opened his eyes an' said somethin' about bein' called away from his sheep when they needed him most. I don't know just why he called them Greasers sheep, 'cause a Greaser's a Greaser, an' if I was goin' to call him any other name, I'd call him a snake. But it seemed to worry the Padre a heap, an' then he said he'd hate to die without the consolation of the rites of his church.

"'Oh, durn my cats, Padre,' I said, 'You're not all in yet, by a jugful. Brace up, man, we'll get you up to camp, an' a few hours' rest will do you a heap of good. Have a good sleep an' you'll be as good as new.' But he said that God had called him an' the big tears ran down his cheeks at the thought of leavin' those sick Greasers when they needed him most.

"Well, I felt pretty durn bad myself, Doc, 'cause you see, I was sort of in the dark about the rites of his church, an' so I couldn't make an offer of puttin' him over the 'Divide' the way he'd like to go, so I says, 'If you're dead sure you're goin' to cash in, Padre, I'll stand by an' do anything for you that a 'white' man can do.

"He didn't say anything for a few minutes. Then, reachin' inside his cassock, he pulled out a picture, an' holdin' my hand, told me he wanted me to find the woman of that picture an' give her a message from him. I gave him a little more whisky an' broth, an' motioned away some of the boys what had gathered around. He rested a minute after swallowin' the broth, an' then began to talk in a weak voice.

"He told me the woman had been his wife some years before, an' instead of raisin' a family as a decent woman should, she'd just raised the devil, an' wound up by skippin' out with a cattle rustler, takin' the kid with her. He could get no trace of her anywhere, an' broken-hearted, he had joined a brotherhood of priests that were tryin' to keep the Greasers straight along the Rio Grande. For years he hadn't heard of her until just before the smallpox hit his town, when he heard she had come back to El Paso an' was runnin' a joint that wasn't in the Sunday-school

line — not by a jugful. He'd made up his mind to get the boy away from her an' was just ready to go to the courts when the smallpox hit his town an' he had to tie down there. He gave me a message of forgiveness for her an' to tell her to bring the boy up decent an' try an' make a 'white' man of him.

"Well, the good Padre didn't last long. He was just worked an' worried to death. His heart went back on him along toward sunset an' he died, with his crucifix against his lips, an' a smile that was just like a mother's blessin'. We buried him alongside his church, in a shady spot where the birds he used to feed could sing to him all day long.

"Not havin' any Catholics in the bunch, eight or ten of them bein' Protestants an' the rest heathens, we were kind of stood up as to the proper kind of send-off to give him, until Jim Thomson, the First Luff, said, 'Doggone it, Cap, he was a Ranger of the Lord, warn't he? We'll give him a soldier's funeral! An' we did, with three volleys an' 'Taps' at the wind-up.

"The doctors an' nurses came a few days later an' we pulled our freight for El Paso. I hunted up the woman, an' she was a sizzler all right. Must have been a fine-looker in her younger days, but what with booze an' a continual raisin' of the devil she made a mighty tough show-down when I struck her trail.

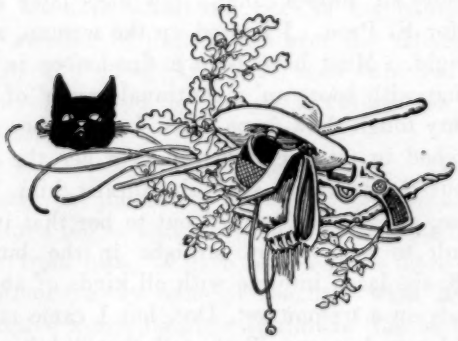
"She laughed in my face when I gave her the good Padre's message about the kid, an' said she'd raise him any way she durned please, an' when I pointed out to her that it'd be considerable difficult to keep a boy straight in the bunch she was runnin' with, she laced into me with all kinds of abuse. I never laid my hands on a woman yet, Doc, but I came mighty near it that day an' I gave her some Texas talk that didn't put any polish on her kind.

"Well, that's about all, Doc, 'cept that one of the fellows that's gone down to the calaboose is the Padre's son. He'd kept the picture I carried to El Paso years ago, 'cause there was some writin' of his father's on the back. The boy's kept straight in spite of his mother, an' older heads led him into the hold-up affair. I've had a talk with him about his father an' if you should hear a fellow hittin' the breeze for the county line about moon-up tonight, forget it, 'cause he'll be on the Sheriff's best bronc' an' I sort'r

think 'twill kind'r please the Padre to know the boy's been given a chance."

The Sheriff looked off toward the snow-capped hills, as he finished, and said, meditatively, "A 'Ranger of the Lord'; Yes siree — that's what he was — an' his smile was just like my dear old mother's blessin' that's stuck to me all these years."

The Doctor looked at the sun-browned, square-jawed face and caught a light in the keen, gray eyes, that revealed to him why the Sheriff was called "white" by every man, woman and child in the county.



God's Kiss.*

BY JEAN MAHAN PLANK.

EACON RAMSAY, sitting at high noon, in the little grape arbor, looked toward the side door of his large, white, green-shuttered house. "The Child" came running down the graveled path. One tiny hand waved a greeting, and the forefinger of the other was laid against her pouting lips in a gesture of secrecy.

She clambered upon the board bench, snuggled up close, and leaned with the deacon against the big elm trunk, which served at once as a back for the seat and a pillar for the arbor. Then she waited for questions.

The deacon crossed his long, thin legs. The circular lines around his mouth deepened instead of relaxing. He passed his lean fingers through his closely-brushed, iron-gray hair, and sighed. The Child had brought the sunshine, but the dark shadow that had walked by Joel Ramsay for two years, — dim and shapeless at first, now looming, black with menaces, — obscured the brightness to his shuddering soul.

The little one touched his arm. He was forgetting her, an indignity without precedent in the two years since the waif of three was adopted by the childless couple. From the first turning of the rose-bud face toward the deacon, the plump baby had marked him for her own. The wife, with her delicate lace caps, and neat, quiet ways, was Authority, gentle though very real; but the stern, precise deacon was nothing but a slave, or playmate at will.

Feeling her touch, he looked down at the astonished little face. "What has happened, Blossom?" he asked, speaking the pet-name awkwardly. None but she had ever heard him use it; to his wife and others, he always said "The Child."

* Copyright, 1908, by The Shortstory Publishing Company. Copyright secured in Great Britain. All rights reserved.

Blossom nestled closer, and smiled with bright merriment. "I was naughty yesterday. I went to Her drawer and took out my little-half-a-glass-locket and played with it all day. Then I put it back."

"Does She know it?" asked the Deacon, gravely.

Blossom shook her head.

"You know," said the deacon, "she doesn't like you to play with it, because it was among your things when — when the Almighty sent you to us." Joel Ramsay seldom became so familiar with the Power above as to say "God."

The little girl tossed her dark curls. "Maybe Awmighty wants me to have it." She looked sidewise at her companion, tentatively.

"You'd better tell Her," suggested the deacon, ignoring the theology.

"To-day?" Blossom leaned forward with elaborate surprise. "Yesterday was a long time ago. To-day I am good; I would not take my little-half-a-glass-locket to-day. If I tell now, I will spoil to-day."

The deacon stared at her. The baby philosophy might serve to dispel his own black shadow. If he could but think so! Had even the Child become a tool to tempt him to further makeshifts?

He turned to her with sudden fierceness. "Go at once," he cried, harshly, "before it is too late — go and tell Her what you have done!"

He seized the Child's arm and lifted her off the seat.

The little girl looked up in dismay as her *fidus Achates* thus suddenly became a Nemesis. She ran, as fast as her slender, white-stockinged legs could carry her, toward the house.

The man wiped his forehead with a colored silk handkerchief. By not letting the Child off, he was forced to the consistency of not letting himself off. Moreover, hadn't even Blossom felt, in spite of her being "good to-day," the necessity of telling some one? He had been her makeshift.

Yellow June roses, along the front picket fence, moved languidly in the breeze. Their perfume sickened him. In the spreading lilac bush, four finches moved about upon the twigs, like pawns on a chess-board. Their sweet gossiping made the deacon turn his head away despairingly.

"I am desolate," he murmured, and with crude simile, "as desolate as a cornfield after the harvesters have passed."

The Child returned, walking slowly, her face filled with awe. She stopped before the deacon and folded her little sunburned hands upon her breast. A bee, humming through the arbor, alighted upon her lip as upon a flower. She scarcely noticed, as the man brushed it away.

"Well?" he asked.

Blossom took a breath, and gasped: "She *kissed* me!"

The deacon stared again. Suddenly he seemed to choke. Blossom gazing at him, saw tears gather in his pale gray eyes.

"I wonder," he said, and his face became child-like, — "I wonder if God would kiss me, if —" His voice died away.

Blossom seemed to comprehend that here was need for sympathy. In an instant she was upon the deacon's lap, encircling his neck with her slim, brown arms. Her face against his, she crooned one of her bye-low songs.

Hannah rang the dinner-bell. Hand in hand, the pair in the arbor went slowly up the walk.

Within the dining-room, cooled and darkened by closed shutters, Mrs. Ramsay, in her soft, second-best black silk, stood by a window, chasing relentlessly the one daring fly that had ventured to explore the immaculate domain of the best house-keeper in Meadow Centre.

"This is a rascal," she said in soft apology, as the deacon and Blossom stood waiting.

The fly escaped into the kitchen. Mrs. Ramsay looked after it thoughtfully and murmured: "I guess that will answer." Leaving one row of slats turned to throw light upon the table, she took her seat behind the urn, and smoothed, with a pair of delicate hands, the straight, white apron tied about her thin, long waist.

The deacon, in a detached manner, sat opposite, while the Child climbed into a high-chair, adjusted her checked bib, and peeped through the open shutter to where white clover grew in thick plats in the grass.

"Father, why do green trees cast purple shadows?"

The deacon started, and looked at her curiously. In his surprise, he spoke unawares.

"Abram used to ask just such strange questions."

At this mention of the name of the deacon's artist brother, a name that had not crossed his lips in years, Mrs. Ramsay threw one swift glance toward her husband, then dropped her eyes to her plate, while a deep flush stole over her faded cheek.

"Hannah," said the deacon, with unaccustomed briskness, "bring some bread."

The girl, aggrieved, pointed to a platter piled with slices near his hand.

Mrs. Ramsay shifted the urn nervously, saying with abstraction: "I guess that will answer."

A silence ensued, which was not broken until the end of the meal, when the deacon donned his wide-brimmed straw hat and made the sound that was usually accepted as a leave-taking.

Down the street he went, with stiff even steps, past the row of little frame buildings in which was his own store. His purpose was a grim one; interest in ordinary affairs was in abeyance. He entered the one-storied, brick bank-building. The wickets were closed, as the clerk had not yet returned from dinner.

Waiting with stern patience, Joel felt vaguely that the sordidness about him accorded more truly with his condition of mind, than the mocking beauty of yellow roses, singing birds, and human tenderness. Through the window, he saw the wooden side of the next building, against which was outlined a dingy step-ladder and the faded rags of a former decoration. The bank's open door revealed, across the hot, narrow, unpaved street, shabby store-fronts, their windows piled with wares without either order or taste. A meek-looking Indian, with a wistful smile upon his very bronze countenance, offered deprecatingly, from his wooden pedestal, a package of cigars. Within the bank, on the dusty tiled floor, stood groups of dejected-looking women, their soiled, badly hung skirts cut with a pitiful attempt at fashion.

The bank-clerk returned, — a gray-haired man, who had held the same position for a quarter of a century, without a thought of bettering it. He was considered prosperous, and was prominent in everything social and religious in Meadow Centre. He greeted Joel Ramsay with solemn cordiality.

The severe lines about the deacon's mouth did not relax.

"I want you to come to my house, Brother Simpson, tonight, at seven o'clock — you and your wife."

Simpson assented gravely. He asked no questions, but he knew that people did not entertain impromptu in Meadow Centre.

The deacon left the bank and went on down the street over the board sidewalk upon which the townspeople had learned to walk with toes well in air. Deacon Brand's wife leaned from a wooden balcony, and called to a Jersey cow, half a block away. As the animal trotted toward the voice with the docility of a well-fed kitten, Joel delivered his invitation to Mrs. Brand, and received her cheery acceptance.

He passed through the circular "city park," across which a woman could throw a stone. The fragile board band-stand was sardonic in its suggestions of bygone celebrations. Opposite the park, he entered the cool, shabby parlor of the little frame hotel, with its dusty chairs and tables, gaudy "air-castle," faded hair-cloth sofa, full of hills and valleys, and its hanging oil lamp, whose smoke had tinted the ceiling with dark frescoes.

The proprietor waddled in, pulling down his shirtsleeves.

"Brother Miller," — Joel's voice seemed to have acquired, in the repetition, a distant monotone, — "I want you to come to my house to-night, at seven o'clock — you and Sister Miller."

The proprietor gave a hitch to his trousers, snapped the elastics about his arms, and, being a retired seaman, said, in a big voice: "I'll be on deck."

Joel sought the preacher and the remaining deacons, and then turned his steps toward the outskirts of the town.

The cemetery was ordinarily regarded as a pleasure-resort by the lovers and holiday-seekers of Meadow Centre; but the deacon knew that, at midday, it was the only spot in which he could have an hour undisturbed. It was a lonely prairie graveyard, where many scattered wooden headstones relieved a few pretentious lots filled with evergreens and marble slabs. The prairie, nevertheless, has her own hour of beauty, and June roses challenged the wild-flowers to cover sunken graves, while the Prairie Queen rioted with abandon over shabby trellises.

In the Ramsay lot, so tidy as to suggest that Mrs. Ramsay's house-keeping extended even out here, was but one grave, its

carved marble headstone the handsomest in the cemetery. The deacon stopped before it and mechanically read the lettering:

ABRAM RAMSAY,
Aged 32 years.

The townspeople had marveled, three years before, at the generosity with which Joel Ramsay had surrounded the burial of his profligate brother, who had indeed, even in his death, brought only disgrace to his name. An artist he was, in truth, but Art is ready to lead either up or down, according to the pleasure of her votaries.

Joel knew that there had been a wife. When, however, news had come from a cheap lodging-house in Denver that Abram Ramsay was lying there dead, the artist had been separated from her for over a year.

The deacon made efforts at the time, to find the wife; he would have been glad to send her a hundred dollars. Now, he thought, as he stood with a quivering face, gazing at the lonely headstone, how glad he would be to give many hundreds — yes, all his possessions would not be too much — to buy back, for his newly-awakened soul, the right to love and beauty.

He gave no sign of the unusual way in which he had spent the afternoon when, at supper-time, he once more entered his own house. The long frock coat of the early sixties was buttoned as snugly as ever, and the deacon's dignity had not lost its precision as he hung up his hat, saying to Mrs. Ramsay, with quiet dryness:

"There'll be some folks here to-night; the pastor and deacons with their wives; Brothers and Sisters Simpson and Miller. Better open the front door, and seat them in the parlor."

The wife accepted his directions in her usual modest silence. She looked at the seam the Child was overcasting, and remarked calmly: "I guess that will answer."

In silence, too, save primly polite greetings, she ushered the guests at seven o'clock, into the big square parlor, while the deacon sat upon the front porch, and bowed with constraint as the visitors came up the steps.

The little girl, in her stiff, new percale, stood by her adopted father's side. With childish intuition, she had asked for her best wax doll, which was brought out only for occasions of state. She held it quietly, without the ardent caresses usually lavished upon the old china one, and her little face was drawn into an infantile likeness to the deacon's expression.

The latter heard, through the open windows, the muffled moving of chairs over the velvet carpet; the rustle of silken skirts as the women adjusted themselves to the straight-backed seats; the rich, full voice of the pastor; the cackling chatter of two or three old men, like the rattle of dead leaves which still cling to the bough; and then he felt the dead silence which settled awkwardly upon the company.

He arose and entered the parlor, the Child close at his heels. He walked to the white marble mantel, pushed aside with his foot the shells which lay about the grate, and faced the company. Blossom, seated upon an ottoman, hugged the doll tightly and glued her gaze to the deacon's face.

The air was becoming warm and heavy, from the shaded oil lamp on the marble-topped table, and the stifling odor of new crape from Mrs. Simpson's mourning-gown. The expectant faces turned toward Joel appalled him; he closed his eyes.

When he began, "Brethren and Sisters," his voice seemed far away; yet with the next words, he felt a sudden yielding of iron bands about his heart. Opening his eyes, he looked freely into each face in turn.

"I've called you here to-night to be my judges. Ten years ago, when my father died, back in York State, he left a will giving his entire property, ten thousand dollars, to me.

"With the will was a letter, directed in my name. This letter spoke of my brother Abram, who had run away from home, some time before. In case Abram returned within a year, I was asked to turn over to him five thousand dollars.

"The year expired. On the day after, I threw the letter into the grate. The paper curled under the force of the blaze," — Joel had forgotten his surroundings, — "I watched until it lay on the wood, shapeless and black."

He paused. "That very night, Abram came home. He had

just heard of Father's death. I showed him the will. He was half-intoxicated at the time, — " The deacon stopped and cleared his throat. " He begged for a little money, and I gave him twenty-five dollars. He left as suddenly as he came, and no one knew that he had been back.

" We removed to Illinois soon after. I never saw him again, although I learned that he had sobered down and was married. Later, came the news of his disgraceful death."

Joel hesitated. A cooling, dew-laden breeze freshened the room with the scent of roses climbing across the west windows.

" I have always meant to walk upright before the Lord; and I think the law would say that I had acted justly.

" But things look different to me now. A year after Abram's death, by the will of the Almighty, the Child was given to us."

The deacon's brow was moist. His task grew harder.

" Brethren," he cried, in a sudden passion of emotion, " I feel to think that the hand of the Lord has been upon me since then. He has opened my eyes. Whatever the law may say, I know I robbed my brother ! " He threw out his hands. " I can stand it no longer ! I've hunted everywhere for his wife, thinking to ease my conscience by making full restitution to her, but I can't find her. There is no way to make it right. You must judge for me — I put myself, in the name of the Lord, in your hands ! "

Trembling, he drew his silk handkerchief from his pocket, and wiped his brow and eyes. The minister coughed; the deacons shifted their positions awkwardly.

There was a rustle of silk. Mrs. Ramsay had arisen to her feet. Her cap-ribbons shook and her thin hands twisted nervously a cambric handkerchief; but when she spoke, it was in the same tone of gentle apology that she used when the tea was a trifle strong.

" I guess I ought to have told, long ago, something that I found out when the Child came to us. You know her mother was an unknown sick woman who was put off the train here unconscious. As nothing could be learned about her, she died at the poorhouse and we took the Child.

" Among the things that the mother left, was the half of a small glass locket — a sort of keepsake, I presume, for it was

wrapped in cotton in a little box tied with white ribbon. I remembered seeing something like it in the trunk that had come with Abram's — body — the year before. So I looked in a box into which I had put his watch and all the little things he seemed to set store by, and I found the other half of the glass locket, — the two pieces fitted exactly.

"Then I looked closer at all his things. There was the framed daguerreotype of a baby, and anybody could see that it had been a likeness of the Child.

"I noticed Abram's watchguard, which was braided of hair, of a peculiar dark reddish color.

"That afternoon, I went out to the poor-house, and got talking with old Nancy Bardwell, — you know she was with the Child's mother when she died. Nancy remembered the mother's hair; she said it was very long, and of a dark red, — mahogany color, Nancy called it; and so is the watch-guard, just that shade.

"I've thought every day that He would see that the Child is growing to look and talk like Abram. I didn't say anything to Him, as I knew he felt hard on account of Abram's wild ways. I thought he might refuse to keep the Child, and — " a natural womanly tenderness broke through the habit or reserve — her voice shook; — "I wanted her! — If restitution will bring comfort to Him — " She fell back upon the homely phrase, — "I guess that will answer."

She sank into her seat. There was a murmur of relief among the men; of sympathy among the women; the pastor exclaimed with fervor: "Praise God!" They all arose and pressed forward.

Joel Ramsey, who had stood as if turned to stone during this recital, fell upon his knees and threw out his arms to the Child.

Blossom sprang toward him, stumbling over her forgotten best doll. The awed rapture in his face touched her little soul as a thing familiar. She put her lips close to his ear with the wondering whisper:

"Did God kiss you?"

"Yes!" he sobbed, and caught her to his breast.

Three of the Third.*

BY FREDERICK FERDINAND MOORE.

ERRIGAN knew that the fatal post and relief had fallen to him — Post Number Three of the third relief. He would be the sentry on duty from midnight until two o'clock and would have to patrol the trail which led into camp through the dreaded jungle.

Four men had already been brought into camp, shapeless masses of flesh and bones, from that post. They had been cut up in the trail. A Moro with a double-edged, twisted creese, is an artist at killing, but he mars his work by overdoing it. A dead man prefers to be found in one place, but a Moro — well, the simple act of slaying does not satisfy a Moro.

Kerrigan felt every eye in the guard detail turn to him in sympathy as the sergeant named him as the sentry on Post Number Three for the third relief. That was when the Moro was accustomed to do his work.

The sergeant watched Kerrigan out of the corner of his eye as he pronounced the words which he felt were sending the soldier to certain death, but Kerrigan never flinched. In the morning he had helped bring in from that post what had been his "bunkie." The tin rice boiler creaked and complained from the load, and every step of the way Kerrigan swore vengeance — softly, and through locked teeth, as a man does when he means what he says.

There was a rumor in the troop that Kerrigan had asked to be detailed for guard, and was going to volunteer to take the third relief, but the first sergeant refused to discuss the matter.

In fact, the whole affair was tabooed in camp. The commanding officer refused to take any action to prevent the killing of his men. He could have ordered the guard doubled on that post and had two men stand the watch, but there was no reason why the

*Copyright, 1908, by The Shortstory Publishing Company. Copyright secured in Great Britain. All rights reserved.

Moloman would not transfer his attentions to some other post. To acknowledge that Post Number Three was more dangerous than any other post would cause a panic among the men. The troop was facing a crisis, and officers and men knew it. They had to do their duty — they had to walk that post — they had to bring in what they found in the trail or be brought in themselves. They were soldiers, and that was soldiering.

That afternoon Kerrigan sat around in the guard room and smoked and polished his rifle barrel — inside. He filled his belt with cartridges and examined each one carefully. He oiled the mechanism of the magazine and sought for dust in the grooves and dusted each part carefully with a tiny brush.

When mess call for supper sounded he went to barracks and arranged his things in his locker. He made several little bundles and wrote a name on each bundle. He wrote a letter and put it in his locker and called Trumpeter Graydon.

"I wish you would keep the key of my locker to-night, Trump. I'm on guard — Three of the Third." He smiled calmly and handed over the key. Graydon did not dare to look in his face, but he shook Kerrigan's hand as he took the key.

"Oh," said Kerrigan, suddenly, as if the thought had come to him at that minute, "I think you blow Taps prettier than any other trumpeter in the regiment. Now, if I was to pass in my checks in the army, I would be happy if I could know that you were going to blow Taps over me when they fire the volleys."

"There isn't anything I wouldn't do for you, Kerrigan — come on to the mess hall and get your chow."

The troop was at supper in the rude native building which served as kitchen and dining-room when Kerrigan and Graydon went in. The chatter ceased as Kerrigan sat down, and he knew that every man in the troop was watching him.

"Oh, Kerrigan!" said the saddler, who lived at the stables and did not know what the others did, "The ice boat will be in from Manila in the morning and those boxing gloves will come. You want to be —"

The quartermaster-sergeant kicked the saddler under the table.

"Say, what's the matter with you? Gone loco?" demanded the saddler, fighting mad in an instant.

The quartermaster-sergeant whispered in his ear and the saddler dropped his eyes to his plate and attacked the stew. If Kerrigan had not been there the troop would have pitched the saddler through the window.

"I'll be down to-morrow afternoon and box you ten rounds," said Kerrigan, and everybody laughed, or started to, for they were not quite sure they ought to laugh.

Kerrigan ate but little, and felt that his presence was casting a gloom over the men. He knew they wanted to talk about him and what was before him, just as he had talked about the others who had been on the jungle post.

He got up from the long table and walked to the door, rolling a cigarette as he went. At the door he stopped and turned suddenly. Every man, looking at him, saw by the light of the cocoanut-oil lamps that he was pale.

He looked down the long table and saw the men who had fought with him through the Philippine campaign — the men who were left. The cook was standing in the door of the kitchen and the cook's police were making a show at serving the tables. They were all looking at Kerrigan and felt that he had eaten his last meal in the troop.

It was as if an audience waited to hear some great man speak. Kerrigan leaned over to the smoking lamp and lit his cigarette. His lips trembled and the cigarette fell to the floor. He picked it up and lit it again, this time with his teeth clinched, and they saw the muscle on his jaw standing out as he turned his profile.

He hitched up his cartridge belt and pulled on his gauntlets.

"Boys," he said, "I've soldiered in a good many outfits in this Yankee Doodle army, but H troop of the Second Cavalry is the best troop in the whole outfit."

He went out and they watched him through the windows as he crossed the parade ground to the guard house in the dim afterglow of the tropical sunset. The supper was tasteless and the conversation lagged.

A recruit left the table and began to whistle softly before he was out of the mess hall. The first sergeant reprimanded him sharply, and the men did not know which one to thank most — the sergeant or the recruit.

"Number One — twelve o'clock."

The corporal of the relief roused himself as he heard the sentry at the guard house call midnight. He listened to the various outposts sending back their "All is well," and then called the relief.

Kerrigan was lying on his back on his cot with his hands folded across his breast and his hat over his face. The corporal shivered as he thought how like a dead man the sleeping soldier looked in the ghastly light.

He felt like an executioner calling a condemned man as he touched the sleeping figure. Kerrigan rubbed his eyes and sprang to his feet. He took a long drink from the can of distilled water, dashed the tepid stuff in his face and fell into the waiting line.

Outside the night was black. They could hear the pulse of the ocean beating on the beach. A lizard was croaking dolefully from a banyan tree and, as they plunged into the jungle, unseen things rustled in the foliage, reptiles glided away and insects chirped shrilly. The air was warm and heavy with the scent of decaying vegetation, blossoms, and the fever-fog rising out of the ground.

Three of the Second halted them in the trail and Kerrigan received the special orders of the post. The relief marched away silently, cursing the discipline which prevented them from staying with Kerrigan and waiting for the fiend with the creese.

Kerrigan moved up the trail and stopped. He took his carbine from his shoulder and held it ready for instant use. The hammer was back and the safety notch turned off. He opened the case of his watch and put his finger on the works to stop it.

After waiting until he had become accustomed to the usual sounds of the jungle, he coughed. It was an innocent little cough that did not disturb the silence. A man twenty feet away could not have sworn which direction it came from — unless he happened to be a keen-eared Moro.

Kerrigan waited several minutes and then he heard a slight rustle in the bamboo trees behind him. He had his finger on the trigger and he smiled in the darkness, but he did not turn toward the sound until he coughed again. He got on one knee and put the muzzle of the carbine down low, for crawling things are near the ground.

The rustle came again, in the same direction, but perhaps a

foot nearer. Kerrigan estimated it to be ten feet away. He coughed again after a short time. It was an encouraging sort of cough, or should be, to a Moro with a creese.

Again he heard the leaves move. The vines grated against something which was gliding between them. It was progressing slowly. It consumed a minute in moving an inch, until it made one long continuous rustle, scarcely to be heard, as the slight noise blended with the little night sounds of the jungle.

The noise stopped. Had Private Kerrigan fallen asleep on his post? There had been a stifled yawn and then a peaceful, gentle snore, followed by the regular, deep breathing of a weary man asleep. At intervals there was a soft snore.

The vines moved again, and now the Thing was bolder, but still cautious. Foot by foot it glided nearer, growing more confident at each snore. Then the noise stopped. The creese was being made ready. It was the instant before the Thing strikes.

Kerrigan snuggled the butt of his carbine under his cheek, so gently that the movement was a caress. His eyes were of no use in aiming — his ears were guiding the carbine sight. Every muscle and nerve was so tense that it seemed they would snap. Great marbles of perspiration grew on his forehead, to break and run down into his eyes, but he did not mind them.

He was glad the troop could not see him, for he feared they might think he was afraid. All he feared was failure. He was trying to do his duty, and that was of more value to him than his life. A wave of gladness came over him as he realized that he had faced this Thing in the dark and was not afraid. He had never known before that he was absolutely fearless. He hoped that he might live so as to be able to enjoy the knowledge. Then he pulled the trigger.

There was no report. The carbine was still in his hands and he had pulled the trigger. He wondered if he had been mistaken. He pressed the steel again and it did not move.

A thousand little needles pricked his spine. His hair sprang up and quivered like a million tiny wires under a powerful magnet. His whole body was galvanized with fear. He was afraid now. He felt himself growing sick. He was unable to think. It did not occur to him that there must be some reason his carbine did

not answer his pressure. All he knew was that he was helpless and that the Thing was before him preparing to strike. He wondered if the others had found themselves in the same plight. He had thought nothing could make him afraid, and he was sick from fright. A great lump rose in his throat and his frame quivered in a great, silent sob — because he was afraid.

The rustle came again. The fear vanished. He suddenly understood what was wrong. The safety notch ! He had thought it open. It was closed.

He snapped it back and pulled the trigger. He saw the jungle open before him in the powder flash and a black shape almost at the muzzle of the carbine, prone before him. He caught the reflection of the fire which leaped from his gun, on a long, snaky bit of steel, pointed toward him. He fired again and again until his magazine was empty and then he tossed cartridges into the chamber in feverish haste and fired until his fingers were burned on the hot barrel.

He heard the other sentinels calling the corporal of the guard and "Boots and Saddles" sounding in the camp. He wondered why there was so much blowing of trumpets and shouting. He laughed at them and kept on firing.

When the guard reached him his ammunition was all gone and he was sitting in the trail laughing and sucking his burned fingers. They held the lantern in his face and he laughed at the flame and whispered to it, "I was afraid — I was afraid !"

"Hell !" said the sergeant of the guard, "What's the matter with him ? Is his hair white, or am I loco ?"

Kerrigan's hair was tinged with white. They picked him up, soothed him, and led him into the post, but still he laughed.

They found the naked form in the grass near where Kerrigan had been sitting. It was full of bullets.

In a few days Kerrigan was better, except that his hair did not turn black again.

The creese hangs over his bunk in barracks.

The Magic Billiard Ball.*

BY EDMUND SMITH MIDDLETON.

IN the lull of an August afternoon Shaman Tuloc sat within the shaded door-way of his little shop, contemplatively smoking. From time to time a thin brown hand slowly stroked his long gray beard, while his dark, melancholy eyes looked far away into the distance.

Presently a shadow darkened the door-way, as a well-dressed stranger halted uncertainly and gazed curiously within. The old merchant rose courteously and with a wave of his hand extended a silent invitation to enter. Seeing that the stranger still hesitated, Shaman said in a tone devoid of eagerness, "Would the gentleman care to step in? It is not necessary to buy?"

An air of distinction in the old man's bearing, scarcely expected in such surroundings, excited the stranger's interest, and with an appreciative, "Thank you, if you don't mind," he entered.

The merchant noted the young man's eyes as they swept over his wares with half-observant gaze, and saw that his face wore the unsatisfied expression of one who seeks something greatly desired.

"It is not merchandise, the gentleman seeks to-day," said Shaman with kindly interest, continuing to search the other's face with his far-seeing orbs.

"Are you a fortune-teller?" asked the stranger eagerly.

"Not in the ordinary sense, my son," answered the aged merchant solemnly, "but much of the wisdom of the East is mine, and I have known the hearts of many men."

"If you help me," burst impulsively from the other's lips, "you may name your own price."

"I am listening, my son," responded Shaman with dignity, apparently unmoved by these glittering promises.

"My name is Philip Arden," began the young man in quick,

*Copyright, 1908, by The Shortstory Publishing Company. Copyright secured in Great Britain. All rights reserved. The writer of this story received a cash prize of $100 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending October 12, 1904.

excited tones, "and I am what people call rich. If my lot had been different, with my own way to make, I should doubtless have become a gambler, as the gaming instinct is strong within me. At times I am consumed with a perfect fever to excel at games involving chance and skill."

"Why do you tell this to me?" demanded the old man.

"You shall see," answered Arden, meeting his glance fairly. "Being wealthy, the gambler's love of gain does not appeal to me. Instead, I have devoted myself to games of skill, playing as an amateur with men of my own class. After making a fad of one game after another, I have settled upon billiards, to which I have devoted myself, heart and soul, for two years."

Just then a soft rustle of silk in the back of the shop, a sudden trembling of swaying curtains, and a quickly caught breath bespoke a listener in those regions. Shaman Tuloc never turned his head, although he heard. Arden was too absorbed in his story to notice. One look at those curtains would have disclosed a pair of peering eyes that shone like midnight.

"Go on," said the merchant, calmly stroking his beard, "There is yet something to tell."

"No lover could have been more devoted to his mistress than I to my favorite game. I wooed her early and late, playing my way up through the ranks at the Club, until last spring I defeated the strongest men and was hailed club champion. But alas! my joy was short lived."

"Your hand lost its cunning?" suggested Shaman Tuloc.

"No, not so. A more subtle hand than mine entered the lists," explained Arden with a touch of bitterness in his tone. "While my laurels were yet fresh, a stranger joined the club, a tall, slender man, with sallow skin and coal-black hair, which parted over a narrow, contracted forehead. His black, beady eyes were set close together over a long hooked nose, and his thin lips were shaded by a scanty black moustache. They say that those ratty weasel-like eyes could look into the shining depths of any jewel and rightly prize its worth. Enough for me that he could play billiards like a fiend. His long slender hands controlled the balls like a magician. He defeated me once, twice, thrice, — each time worse than before,— in a word, ignominiously. Let me van-

quish him! Help me to defeat him!" cried Arden, moved to the depths of his being, "and I will give you what you like."

Shaman Tuloc smoked a while in silence, then rose from his seat and drew a small casket from a secret recess in the rear of the shop. The box was of fragrant sandal-wood, wrapped with cords and sealed in many places. Carefully removing these, he disclosed a small bundle of numerous layers of fine silk, concealing some object within. Very reverently the old man unwrapped the silken folds until there lay uncovered in his palm a small cylinder of ivory of wondrous quality, and without spot or blemish.

"My son, you behold a portion of the tusk of the Sacred Elephant of Siam, the most sacred of the holy herd. He went into the silence at the age of two hundred years and this relic possesses a mighty power. Listen to the words on the scroll. I will interpret." As Shaman Tuloc spoke he lifted from the casket an oriental scroll and reverently held it towards the light.

"To the pure and single of heart," he read in a low voice, "I will grant his wish."

"I will give any price, fulfill any conditions," exclaimed Arden in a choking voice, his whole form trembling.

"Look! What do you see?" the old man suddenly demanded, holding the ivory above his head.

"Only the ivory, nothing more," the young man answered.

"Look again!" cried Shaman Tuloc eagerly, "Look at the centre! What do you see now?"

"I see a delicate pink light shining through the ivory," answered Arden excitedly. "It seems to move and tremble like a rose swaying in the breeze."

"It is the soul of the sacred tusks!" cried Tuloc triumphantly, "the spirit, the life. Therein lies the power."

"What am I to do? Tell me!" demanded the young man.

"Bring from your club the finest ball you have. My hands shall fashion its mate in size and appearance from the sacred tusk. I will entrust the task to no other. In a week's time you shall have a ball, endowed with the living spirit of victory."

That same evening Arden brought from the club the desired model and the next day Shaman Tuloc began his self-imposed task. As he wrought his labor of love, patiently, silently, with reveren-

tial skill, the slender, graceful form of his only daughter glided often through the parted curtains and hung over her father's shoulder with moist eyes and heaving bosom. More than once a rosy blush suffused her modest cheek as she recalled the young stranger's face and trembling voice. Then she murmured a silent prayer for her father's task and for the young man's victory.

On the eighth day the ball was finished, and to the instructed eye seemed to throb visibly with sentient life, as it lay, white and glistening, in the sandal casket.

"Take it, my son," said Shaman Tuloc, committing the box to him. "Let no other hand than thine use this sacred ball. Let no other interest divide your heart. Then victory will attend."

The report that Arden was to play his conqueror again filled the club house. An undefinable feeling was in the air that this game would possess unusual features — that it was a strife for mastery to an unusual degree.

The two men presented a remarkable contrast as they stood in evening dress at the end of the table ready to begin. One was the picture of cold, nervy cunning and calculation, the other, the best type of a gentleman player, brave, generous, skilled, eager for the fray. It was like night matched against day — the powers of darkness arrayed against the powers of light.

To the surprise of his ferret-eyed opponent, Arden, playing with the sacred ball, won the bank. The balls were spotted and the game began. The style of play was fourteen-inch balk line, one shot in. Without effort, by graceful, easy play, Arden rolled off run after run. His ball was absolutely under control and the audience was with him to a man, following his game with frequent applause. But, do what he would, Arden could not shake off his opponent. He answered run with run and invariably finished a point or two in the lead.

Arden, however, never lost confidence for a moment in his ball or the outcome of the game. As the players approached the goal, the 300 mark, almost abreast, but the dark man still in the lead, the excitement grew intense. With only eight to go, the latter ran six and missed on his 299th shot. A hateful scowl showed on his face but changed instantly to a triumphant smile, as he saw that Arden, who stood at 295, was left an impossible shot.

Arden's ball lay tight against the cushions in one corner, the red ball in the same position in the far corner on the same side, and his opponent's ball against the cushion along the rail half way between the other two balls.

It, indeed, looked to be an impossible shot, but Arden, with unruffled confidence played a *massé*, whose like had never been seen on that or any other table. His ball, with a beautiful curve, spun to the ball half way down the rail, continued its journey in the same marvelously accurate fashion to the red ball, and counted, of course. The house fairly thundered its applause. The result of the shot was to leave the three balls lined up along the centre of the table. A second brilliant *massé* counted 297, and the remaining three shots were clicked off in rapid succession.

As Arden made the last shot, which meant victory for him, he felt his eyes drawn irresistibly across the table to the tier of seats opposite. His gaze rested on a pair of eyes shining with a radiancy he had never seen before. As he felt himself yielding to their power and started towards them, a strange thing happened. With a sudden click the wonderful ball, with which he had played and won, snapped asunder and parted into two pieces. As it fell apart, Arden saw an appearance like a delicate pink flame leave the ball, pass through the air towards the wonderful eyes, then over the head of Shaman Tuloc's beautiful daughter and away.

A minute later Arden was holding her by the hands and gazing at close range into those wondrous orbs. Tuloc hastened to the table and clasped the precious fragments of ivory to his breast.

Later that night, as he stood beside the beautiful Esther in her father's shop, Arden asked, "Why did the ivory ball snap and the pink soul flee away?"

"Because, my son, another love had come into your heart"—and then, as Shaman Tuloc looked on the young people, he raised his hands and said, solemnly, "The God of heaven bless you, my children!"

The Hatchet-Boy.*

BY ALBERT W. TOLMAN.

LEE SONG, squatting at midnight in a back seat of the smoker, drowsily inhaled the warm fumes of his cigarette, as he blinked through the lamplit reek on the lines of sleeping men sprawled along the sides of the car. His face, round, unwrinkled, guileless, proclaimed him an ordinary inoffensive Chinaman.

Under Lee's feet lay his straw extension case. It contained a Testament and several Chinese tracts, but also the tools of his trade — a bulldog revolver, a long, narrow knife and a stout cord.

A poor workman quarrels with his tools — but Lee Song never quarreled with his. The cord was new and unfrayed, the knife ground keen, and every chamber of the seven-shooter loaded. It was Lee's attention to details, joined with certain other admirable qualities, that had made him the foremost hatchet-boy of the Liu Kwen Tong.

Lee Song was an artist, either at premeditated assassination or impromptu murder. In his make-up was nothing spectacular, no boasting or bravado. Pistol-butt and knife-haft showed no notches — but he never failed to get his man.

When the Tong sends Lee Song after you, you are as good as dead already, and may as well get measured for your coffin.

On this special night the hatchet-boy was bound for a certain city to send a laundryman named Billy Wing to sleep beside his fathers. Why the Tong wanted Billy killed was immaterial to Lee. His business was simply to obey, to strike like lightning, like lightning to disappear.

The job promised to be a simple one. Lee smoked dreamily. His soul was at peace, save when he thought of his only son, who had died a month before. Every time the little white casket rose

*Copyright, 1908, by The Shortstory Publishing Company. Copyright secured in Great Britain. All rights reserved.

before Lee's eyes a devil who stood beside him night and day ran a sharp dagger into his heart. So often had the devil done this that the spot was very sore.

All night he journeyed, sleeping and waking, and at early dawn came to the city where lived Billy Wing.

There were few Chinese in the place, and Lee easily found Billy's laundry. Entering, he made the opium-smuggler's sign to the proprietor, who was wrapping up a shirt for a customer. Billy signalled back, his eyes glittering. After the customer went out, he asked eagerly:

"When?"

"To-night at ten," answered Lee. Men who smoke opium should not incur the Tong's displeasure.

The hatchet-boy ran an experienced eye over the laundry, sizing it up for the kill and the get-away. Ah, yes, that back room! The job over, he could shed his false queue, shift his clothes, and slip out of town on a freight like a common American tramp.

As he started out of the door, a little Chinese boy slipped in. The devil stabbed Lee sharply in the sore spot, for the lad was about five, just the age his own son had been. The hatchet-man's heart warmed toward him, and he turned back. Billy was upbraiding the child for being late.

"Son of a pig!" he screamed shrilly. "Where have you been so long?"

With a buffet he sent him reeling into a corner. The little fellow picked himself up without a whimper, and disappeared into the back room, rubbing his head. Lee's fingers drew up toward something in his sleeve. He wished it were ten o'clock at night now.

"'Tis Jing, the son of my brother, who died with his wife of the fever last spring," explained Billy. "Would the boy had died with them. He is not worth the food he eats or the clothes he wears. I can save no money while he is with me."

Lee replied nothing. Billy was going that night where money would not be needed.

All that day the hatchet-boy lurked in the outskirts of the city. He thought much of little Jing, and of Billy's cruelty to him, and the spot over his heart was very sore. But he could not kill the

laundryman, until he received final orders, at seven that night, from the Tong.

Promptly on the hour he was at the post-office. The general delivery clerk handed him a letter containing a white sheet, entirely blank. Its upper right-hand corner showed a slight nail-mark. This was made by the right forefinger of the chief of the Tong. It signified that Billy should live.

Lee Song felt the devil's dagger again. He had planned that afternoon to adopt little Jing, after Billy had gone to his fathers. Sorely disappointed, he pondered, walking in the dusk. At last he came to a decision. He would kill Billy on his own account, and take the boy. True, it was somewhat irregular — but the Tong's rules did not forbid the avenging of a private feud, and Song took Billy's abuse of Jing as a personal matter.

At quarter to ten he started for Billy's laundry. A crowd of young hoodlums on a corner hooted and hustled the mild Chinaman, and turned him back. Song bore it meekly. But they would not have hustled him, had they known what lay hid in the secret pocket up his broad sleeve.

It was half-past ten before he tapped on the laundry door. Billy opened it quickly.

"You are late," grunted he resentfully. He did not enjoy being cheated of his smoke.

"Be content," smiled Lee Song. "You shall have enough presently."

In a box in the back room Jing lay asleep, curled up like a kitten. Billy did not even look at him. Out of his sleeve he shook two packets of opium.

"Try this, before you buy," said he; and Billy snatched it greedily.

Each produced his pipe, and they began to smoke.

For the first five minutes between whiffs, Billy talked of Canton; for the second five he spoke occasionally in monosyllables; the third five he smoked in silence; suddenly the pipe twitched from his fingers, and he tumbled back on the bunk. Surely, it was strong opium.

Lee Song, watching him cat-like, laid down his own pipe, and stood up. The time had come for Billy to join his fathers.

There are pistol-jobs, and knife-jobs, and rope-jobs. This was to be a rope-job. From his sleeve Lee produced a cord. Skilfully slipping it round Billy's neck, he rolled him over on his face.

Crossing the rope-ends the hatchet-boy grasped one firmly in each hand. His arms stiffened. A strong, steady pull would soon do the business. But Billy snored peacefully on.

Lee Song's gorge rose. Disgust possessed him; not pity, for hatchet-boys know no pity. It was a job for a novice, a bungler, unworthy a finished artist.

"Bah!" he grunted. "It is too easy. I kill men, not pigs."

Contemptuously pulling out the cord he rolled Billy over again on his back. Then he stepped to the box where Jing lay curled, and shook him lightly.

"Come," he said.

The boy started up, looked at him a moment in sleepy wonder, then unhesitatingly stretched out his arms. The hatchet-man lifted him, and passed into the night.

Two hours later Lee Song sat in the corner of the smoking-car, bound for the great city. In his arms lay Jing, fast asleep, one hand tightly clasping Song's right forefinger, that terrible finger which had sent so many Chinamen to join their fathers.

The hatchet-boy looked down on the little black head in the hollow of his arm. He pressed the limp, thin body against his breast, and felt the quick-beating heart and the gentle breathing. His room in Mott Street would be brighter with this little fellow playing in it.

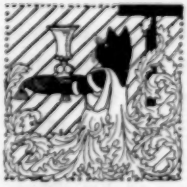
A wave of strange tenderness swept over Lee Song. Again the devil stabbed him, but his dagger was blunted. The sore place did not hurt so much. His lips were silent, but in his heart he said:

"It is good to have a little boy."

"The Heart of God."*

BY JOANNA E. WOOD.

[This story, which appeared in THE BLACK CAT more than ten years ago, is reprinted to meet the demand of many readers and as a model for storywriters. Built of literary materials of unusual quality, and based upon a foundation of scientific truth, it embodies, besides those elements of human interest essential to a really great story—adventure, love and mystery—the rare merit in fiction of instructiveness, and while possessing the quality of a two-volume novel is told within the limits of a short story. THE BLACK CAT paid the author $500 for this tale.]



THREE men sat in a handsome office-like room in a London house, around a mahogany table across which questions involving millions of money had been decided.

The oldest of the three was a short little man, with white hair and red face, of choleric habit, evidently, and having a due sense of his own importance, which had been very great in India, and was still greater in the monetary world, for he was Sir Lucius Lang, sometimes an officer in her Majesty's Indian Service, and now known far and near as a financier. After having survived the fluctuations of the *rupee* for so many years, the vagaries of the stock market merely amused him.

Seated opposite to him was a tall, spare man, a man, one would have said, who knew accurately the location of his liver; he had a hook nose — there is much virtue in a hook — of a certain kind, but Arthur Godwin's hook was not Semitic, but of the type which attained apotheosis as an adornment of the Iron Duke. Therefore it indicated ancestors rather than speculative acumen; nevertheless, Arthur Godwin's favorite recreation was to come up to London and indulge in financial flyers.

Birds of various feathers these flyers were, and rarely showed homing tendencies, but flew away into the blue and rose perspective of speculative distance, never to return.

The man sitting between Sir Lucius and Godwin was a great contrast to his companions.

He was young, and brown, and lean, with a sunburnt mustache

* Copyright, 1908 by The Shortstory Publishing Company. Copyright secured in Great Britain. All rights reserved. This story received the second prize of $500 in THE BLACK CAT $2,600 prize competition.

and a square jaw; his eyes were gray and very keen, and his whole appearance was that of a man who had often played for big stakes against heavy odds. Thought and action were simultaneous with him, and there was so much alertness in his pose as to suggest that he had lived among people not above suspicion.

His name was Allan Trask, and he was an American, if any nationality can be rightly given to a man of such cosmopolitan experiences. He had mined gold in California and opals in Mexico; he had sought silver in Peru and dug for nuggets in Australia.

He had lived on horse meat at St. Etienne, when the ponies injured in the mines had been raised to the surface to be converted into beefsteak; he had supped off grasshoppers in oil in Africa, and breakfasted off blubber amid the eternal snows, and rejoiced over kangaroo tail soup in New Zealand; — and when he found himself at a civilized table displayed discrimination in his drinking and ease in his deportment.

There had been a love story. Reversing national precedent, he had fallen in love with an English girl, and she with him; but there had been rumors, untrue but difficult to meet; his wild ways frightened her, and her people, spicing their tales of him with that devil's salt, a grain of truth, managed to prejudice her judgment (not her heart, for that never wavered), and so they parted. Perhaps Trask's pleading had not been very gentle; he thought of it sometimes and cursed himself for a brute, and entered into enterprises more and more hazardous, just to show the poor opinion he had of his own value.

But he came forth scathless from every danger, and the ache at his heart grew worse. Of all his exploits the last had been the most perilous, but he had succeeded, and the result was brilliant, literally, for it was represented by the magnificent diamond, worth a king's ransom, which lay like a lump of solidified fire upon the center of the table.

He had got it, no matter where, but at the cost of much money and the hourly risk of his life for weeks. Never before had this unsurpassable gem changed hands but at the price of many lives; dynasties had depended upon its possession; it had been the cause of wars, and conflagrations, and insurrections. Men and women

had died mistaking its glitter, which dazzled their glazing eyes, for the gleams from the opening gates of paradise. Never before had European eyes beheld it, though the soldiers in India had heard of the glory of the "Heart of God," and many of them had marveled together over it, and wondered if the name was used figuratively, or if there was indeed in the possession of the priests a precious stone which merited the rhapsodies of the natives.

When Sir Lucius Lang left India he had brought with him an Indian servant named Tippoo, a child rescued from the sack of a temple of one of the occult faiths.

This child, gifted with all the subtlety and craft of the East, educated in the more practical, if coarser, ethics of the English, developed into a very handsome man, who, hung with rich Oriental stuffs in winter, or clad in snow-white linen in summer, acted as body servant to Sir Lucius.

He made curries and cooked rice with the art inherent in his race, and always stood behind Sir Lucius's chair at table. If Sir Lucius had occasion to punish Tippoo, he did so characteristically, for, after the regulation toast "to the army abroad" had been drunk, he would launch forth into a description of the Indian mutiny; and with a malignity which would have been fiendish, if it had not been so very justifiable, he described the treachery of the natives and the terrible punishments meted out to them. England's strong hand had fallen heavily in her righteous wrath, and Sir Lucius kept the memory of it alive in the heart of Tippoo, who, during the torture of these recitals, stood livid and trembling, enduring, it would seem, in his own proper person all the agony and humiliation meted out to his treacherous race. And after such an experience he would lie all night in a wide-eyed trance, for the vivid descriptions of Sir Lucius brought back to him with photographic accuracy the panorama of weird, terrible sights he had witnessed, crouched in the judgment hall of the sacred temple.

At first these memories were a meaningless phantasmagoria of horror to him, but as he grew older he began to decipher their import, and, remembering the gorgeousness of the temple, he began to calculate its worth; and whereas he had once trembled before these visions, he now sought them, and with his inherited power of

mental concentration set himself to dive deeper and deeper into his childish memories. Thus he succeeded in unrolling the scroll of his experiences back to the very alphabet of his infantile impressions, and he studied their misty outlines till he could read clearly every symbol impressed upon the plastic tables of his memory. He could have told strange tales of the hatching of many devilish plans which ere long perfected themselves in deeds which appalled the whole civilized world; he could have told of the sowing of that fatal seed which bore a terrible blossom of blood and flame; he could have told who breathed forth that mysterious whisper, which, like the hissing of an unseen snake, ran all over India, bidding the brown people rise and slay; he could have told from whence came the strange cakes impressed with the mystic, omnipotent symbol, which were found one morning, three days before the mutiny, in every building wherein men dwelt in India, from the viceroy's palace to the fakir's hut. Mingled with these were other recollections — of priests filled with fanatic faith, who, ere they left their temple to kill and maim and torture, hid the treasure of their gods so cunningly that no mortal man could find it unaided; and piercing far, far back, he recalled how, with splendid procession and solemn promises of human oblations, they had taken the great Heart of God from the wooden statue which held it and hid it away. In the East the heart is supposed to be the genesis of thought, and these priests kept the Heart of God in a gilded wooden statue, to signify that the purposes of God are wrought through perishable mediums and perfected by poor mean mortals.

Tippoo remembered how, when the white unbelievers had visited the temple, they had passed by the wooden statue and gloated with greedy eyes over the gold and silver emblems in other niches; and he remembered, too, how the High Priest had gloomed after them, muttering to himself that the spirit of the true God did not dwell beneath the gay uniform of the English soldier, but beneath the bare brown skin of the humble priests, even as the great diamond Heart of God was hidden beneath the humble wood.

And one day Tippoo sought audience of Sir Lucius, and standing humbly before him divulged to him the secret of the Heart of God, told him where it was hidden, and offered to supply a map

of the location, and sighed with melancholy gentleness as he concluded, "The old gods were perhaps false, but their hearts were good, and such things are greatly prized here, and are of much price."

Price! Sir Lucius thought he knew better than Tippoo the price of diamonds.

Now, to any one unacquainted with India, this tale would have seemed incredible, but Sir Lucius knew the incalculable riches of the temples, and knew that whenever he wanted it, the most miserable fakir by the wayside could command untold treasures; Sir Lucius had heard of the Heart of God, and there was no doubt in his mind that Tippoo knew whereof he spoke.

But Sir Lucius knew, too, better than most, the watchful dragons of cunning which guard even the ruined temples. He knew the armed silent shadows which grow, it would seem, out of the barren rock to steal after the rash investigator. An Englishman disappears, the vultures hover even more thickly than usual above the courts of the ruined temple, the natives see them and smile.

Sir Lucius had "considered with himself," and the result was a communication to Arthur Godwin, which brought that gentleman to town in a hurry, and after several hours' talk across the mahogany table they decided to finance an expedition of one.

It would seem the great difficulty lay here — the man.

But Sir Lucius thought he knew him, he suggested Trask; it was a niece of Sir Lucius with whom Trask had fallen in love, and of all her relatives, the old "fighting uncle" had been the only sympathizer.

Decency made him sympathize sneakingly, Trask was so strikingly ineligible; but, as the old man said with a whole-souled oath, "he feared neither the face of man nor the horns of the devil." To which his sister, the girl's mother, remarked austerely that the young man seemed "equally free from the fear of God." Sir Lucius opened his mouth, but remembering he was no longer a fire-eating soldier, but a peaceable land owner, closed it and grew purple in the face from repressed speech.

When the proposed search for the diamond was suggested to Trask he grasped at it eagerly.

What was life worth to him? Nothing.

So with as sad a heart as ever left England, Trask "set his foot on the ship, and sailed to the other side of the world."

And there he had faced death in every form. From plague, and fever, and starvation; from knife, and poison, and ambuscade; from thugs, and reptiles, and wild creatures; from pitfalls, enchantments, and women, he had escaped and brought back the Heart of God.

And there it lay upon the table, undoubtedly the finest diamond in the world. And Sir Lucius had told Trask that his niece Edith had not spoken to him for months, since she had found he had some part in sending Trask into danger; and Trask's lean face glowed with a greater joy than he had felt when, on the throbbing deck of the liner, he had pressed the diamond hard against his breast, and seen the Indian shore grow dim in the distance.

The diamond had been shown to Tippoo, and he was promised a rich reward; but he trembled, and said that, though the old gods might not be powerful any more, yet he would not further anger them by taking money for having betrayed their secrets; it was indeed a terrible thing to have done. "But," he added in Oriental phrase, looking at his master, "love is stronger than fear."

"It is," said Trask below his breath, and for a moment his eyes stung as if with salt water.

The discussion between the three men was now as to the best method of selling the diamond.

Its enormous size forbade any private sale, and they were in no mind to be dispossessed by the crown. It would have to be cut up. It was certainly a terrible shame — still — it meant millions. They could have it cut into many pieces, and yet each would be perfect, and greater than the greatest solitaires.

It was enough to make a man's head swim, certainly talking of it made their throats dry.

"We will have a glass of sherry," said Sir Lucius, and rang for Tippoo.

He gave the order, to which Trask supplemented a request for a glass of water.

"What!" said Sir Lucius. Trask reaffirmed his preference, and Tippoo departed.

"They said once I drank," he said, "though I never was drunk

in my life! But since then I've never tasted a drop, just to give the girl an unanswerable argument — if she cares to use it."

Sir Lucius gave him a great slap on the back.

"Well, drink the water! But it's the last in my house! I've wired for Edith and her mother in terms they won't disregard; they'll be here to-night, and you will have some time alone with Edith — if you care to use it."

Trask reached out his hand and Sir Lucius wrung it, and when he relinquished it Godwin's palm was waiting. They shook hands across the diamond — the slanting sun rays smote it into flame, and Tippoo entered with the sherry decanter and two glasses, and a huge crystal goblet of water. The three men raised their glasses to their lips; the two sherry glasses were put empty on the table, Tippoo placed them on the tray. A moment after Trask put down the glass of water half full, Tippoo placed it on his tray beside the other glasses. Trask looked from one to the other of the two men and then suddenly cried: —

"Where's the diamond?"

It was gone.

Tippoo gave such a start that the water in the half-filled glass leaped up in a little silvery wave. Then with the impassivity of the Oriental he turned away. Arthur Godwin's face was livid, Sir Lucius's eyes were suffused with blood and his face was purple.

Trask's eyes glittered fiercely.

"Wait," thundered Sir Lucius to Tippoo; "stand where you are." And while the Eastern servant stood in his white draperies, holding the tray in hands that did not quiver, the three men sought the floor, the table, their own persons — but the diamond was gone.

"Strip!" said Sir Lucius briefly to Tippoo.

With a kind of proud humility Tippoo obeyed. Nor was his master content till he stood nude, slender and beautiful as a bronze Hermes before them.

Inch by inch Sir Lucius searched the linen draperies, and the gorgeous silk girdle, and the flat straw slippers, then threw them back with a brief: —

"I was wrong."

Tippoo cast his draperies about him.

"Does the Sahib will that I remain?" he asked, ineffable and touching reproach in his great eyes.

"No; go, Tippoo," said Sir Lucius kindly; a preeminently just man, he already regretted his suspicions.

With melancholy grace Tippoo picked up his tray and departed. He paused at the door.

"It is well that I should be punished by the Sahib's doubts. The great fathers are very angry. It is their vengeance upon me. They have taken back the Heart of God."

He closed the door and the three men looked at each other, and as they looked fear fell upon them — intangible fear of intangible things.

It was broad daylight; the sunlight streamed in at the window.

Trask had brought away the diamond from amid the most insidious dangers; it had been spirited away from beneath their very eyes. A blankness of mind fell upon them. They could not reason, for they had absolutely no hypothesis to go upon.

Suddenly Godwin rose. "I don't wish to be rude," he said, "but, frankly, Sir Lucius, I should be more comfortable out of here."

"I believe I should myself," said Sir Lucius.

Trask rose with them, but his face had grown very stern and set.

"Wait a moment," he said. "I risked my life fifty — no, a hundred — times to get that diamond, and now by some infernal diablerie it is whisked away from beneath our very noses, from between our very fingers, from under our very eyes, but I'll find that diamond again if it is on earth. All the magic in hell won't guard it against me. I'll find where that diamond has gone if I have to beg, a fakir in a breech-clout, along the Indian waysides. If you could guess what I've been through! The effort to get it, the unspeakable horror of its surroundings, the mental torture of fear, — for I've known that agony, — the dreadful danger of my return journey, the poisoned food, the benumbing smoke of deadly drugs creeping round me as I slept, and I've passed through these things to be bedeviled in broad daylight! It's intolerable!"

"My boy," said Sir Lucius kindly, "I had no real idea, after

all, to what I was sending you. You will forgive me? Edith shall ask you, too, and I think she'll have something to say about the fakir idea. Though perhaps two can play at that game. But, seriously, it is Godwin and I who have failed in this scheme; and, after all, the speculation was not fair, for you hazarded life and limb, and Godwin and I only money, and when you brought the diamond back we failed to keep it. Come back to dinner, both of you, and don't worry over the thing. Edith will have plenty, and Godwin and I can scramble along. Eh, Godwin?"

"Yes, indeed," said Godwin heartily. "Yes, indeed."

Trask's face relaxed.

"Come back early; don't wait for the dinner hour. I say, *did* you ever know such a devilish strange thing?"

They stood for a quarter of an hour together, babbling like boys of their amazement, and then parted.

. . . . . .

Trask and Edith were definitely engaged.

Trask's face, which was so strong as to be almost brutal, quivered with tenderness as he bent above the girl whose love had been great enough to overcome her fear of his wild ways and stern face; and Edith knew that never again would he frighten her, for his second wooing was very gentle, and her timorous fingers nestled confidently in his strong, lean hand. Their engagement was not to be too long, but Edith's mother was determined to have it decently conventional; and often, as Trask strode away from his sweetheart, he felt a wicked wish within him that he could drop the old lady down a well or something, not with any desire to injure her, but merely, as he naively said to himself, to get her out of the way for a little while.

For he thought, with tender triumph, that if he held out his arms Edith would slip into them of her own accord, if she were let alone.

The intensity of his love had made his first wooing too stern; now it had come about that this fire eater trembled at the touch of Edith's fragile hands; only sometimes in the midst of her tyrannies a sudden fright would reassert itself, and then his new-found gentleness exerted itself to reassure her.

But mingled with the glamour of his love dream there was always the stern resolve to find out the fate of the diamond.

Poor Tippoo had had a sad end.

From the day of the diamond's disappearance he had never been well. Afterwards the other servants said he had eaten nothing for days.

He grew thinner and thinner, an unnatural brilliancy dilated his eyes. He had fits of weeping over his master's doubt of him, and Sir Lucius reproached himself bitterly because of his hasty suspicion, and finally Tippoo began to ramble and grow incoherent in his speech, and one night he disappeared and could not be found. He had seemed greatly disturbed that day, muttering incessantly to himself, and declaring to the other servants that his gods and the great fathers were angry at him and were punishing him, and that he was not fit to live. These things were, of course, quite unintelligible to the servants, but Sir Lucius put upon them an interpretation which wrung his generous old heart.

He repeated them to Trask and Godwin, and all three decided that doubtless Tippoo had made away with himself.

Sir Lucius clung to the idea that he might have wandered off while he was not himself, and advertised far and near for any clue. The advertisement was widely spread, and attracted the attention of a rich East Indian student at Cambridge, who, after inquiring particulars from Sir Lucius, supplemented that gentleman's reward by a very liberal one; but poor Tippoo was never heard of. Meantime, Trask studied occultism with the devotion of a *Cheelah,* he found out every devotee in England, he trailed London from one end to the other in pursuit of promises of enlightenment, he consorted with greasy workers of miracles and frowzy mediums, and hobnobbed with fashionable and learned Theosophists; he sought out stray East Indians, and by guile and gold gained entrance to a cleverly contrived shrine where Buddha was adored in the heart of London as in the Eastern jungles; he read deeply, and spent his substance upon rare books of occult lore; he became an adept in magic white and black, and knew cabalistic words terrible to utter, but none of his cunning enabled him to find the whereabouts of the diamond, or to account for its disappearance.

It is said that one who has ever dealt in diamonds can never free himself from their fascination; and after Trask's romantic association with what was undoubtedly the finest diamond ever brought to England, it is not surprising that his interest was sustained in the precious gems, and that he came little by little to know most of the prominent diamond men in the country. Thus it was that he found himself a guest at a great banquet given by and for diamond men. And very well he was entertained, though the continual talk about diamonds served to make the cogent subject of his unending search unpleasantly prominent in his thoughts. Just as he was slipping into a reverie he was brought out of it by an even heartier laugh than usual, and came back to the scene about him to find that a genial old man who had won wealth from the blue clay at Kimberley was telling stories.

"You needn't laugh," he was saying, "it's quite true! There was Hodgins at Kimberley; he built a house and plastered it outside with rough cast made from the mine waste, and after the rains washed the house it glittered in the sun as if it was frosted, and they picked out hundreds of pounds' worth of diamonds. It was that which led to the present system of searching. Those were great days! Once I went up country to the upper mines and came back minus all my kit but my shirt and trousers, but with half a pocketful of stones; for the excitement ran so high that they wouldn't leave the mines for anything, and clothes were not to be had for love or money. I got a regular sparkler for my watch. That was the time to live — but living was high, too, a guinea a bottle for Belfast ale! I remember Hodgins showing me the great 'Up-country diamond.' That was a gem like a gem! Why, Hodgins dropped it into a glass of water and it was so pure and flawless that you could not see it. It was as transparent as the water, and you'd never dream it was there; it made me perfectly nervous, it was so strange to see it disappear so utterly. A game of 'now you see it and now you don't' played with a diamond worth thousands and thousands of pounds."

Trask heard no more, for the long table with its brilliant lights and flowers, with its many guests and numerous attendants, faded from before his eyes; instead of the great banquet room he saw the little office-like room in Sir Lucius Lang's house; instead of

the banquet board he saw the little mahogany table; instead of the long line of jolly men he saw the white face of Arthur Godwin, the purpling countenance of Sir Lucius, he saw this visionary scene in detail, and noted the little wave leap up in the crystal goblet which the gentle Tippoo held.

How simply he had duped them!

Palmed the gem, and dropped it into the water before their very eyes! No wonder he had been so willing to be searched.

This was the occult phenomenon which had so bewildered them. He remembered the symptoms of Tippoo's illness, and his disappearance, and could hardly conceal his wrath.

. . . . . .

The next morning but one Sir Lucius Lang, Arthur Godwin, and Allan Trask met again round the little mahogany table, but the terror of mysterious forces no longer made them uneasy; instead, impotent rage knit their brows.

"To think," groaned Trask, "that you two furnished the money, and I risked my life to bring that diamond within the reach of that brown beggar!"

Old Sir Lucius nearly foamed at the mouth when he remembered how he had reproached himself for his suspicions of the innocent Tippoo.

Arthur Godwin did not rage, but he had made one or two very lucky speculations, and he intimated that his check book was at Trask's disposal if he would look up Tippoo.

. . . . . .

Trask and Edith had been married five years, and they were the greatest chums in the world, — real comrades, going everywhere, doing everything, together; they had run over to Paris for Easter, and it seemed to them that the beautiful city, having put off the sackcloth and ashes of her Lenten penances, was more gay than ever before. They had been looking at the treasures of the *Rue de la Paix*, for they both had a liking for shop windows, and no windows are so enthralling as the jewelers'; and as they walked along the Boulevard they were attracted by the long line of people waiting to take their turn in entering to view the wonders of the "Cinemetagraphe," that wonderful development of the kinetoscope, which projects life-size figures upon a screen in such a

manner that the real scene and events proceed before the eyes with every movement and gesture true to life. They saw the babies playing by the sea, they saw the blacksmith shoeing a horse, they saw the mischievous gardener turning his hose upon his friend, and then they saw the arrival of a train. They first saw the track stretching in two black lines, then the engine appeared, growing greater and greater till it passed out of sight, and the train halted, and then they saw the passengers descend. One of the first stepped from a first-class carriage, followed by a man who carried his rugs and hat box. He walked staight towards them along the platform till he was in the foreground of the scene; suddenly the changing picture was a blank; then another picture began, but neither Trask nor his wife saw it, for they had clasped each other's hands in strange excitement. They looked at each other.

"Are you sure?" asked Trask.

"Perfectly," said. Edith. "It was Tippoo."

For the man they had seen in the changing picture was Tippoo, but dressed in the regular traveling tweeds of an Englishman, and escorted by his valet. With much difficulty, Trask found that the photograph had been taken as a London train arrived at Folkestone to meet the Paris boat, some few months before.

Trask went back to England, and struggled to find some clue, but in vain; and old Sir Lucius raved afresh when he heard the story; in fact, the loss of the diamond itself had not enraged him so much as the idea that Tippoo had a valet.

A few months later Sir Lucius received a letter postmarked in India. It was very polite:

> *My dear Sir Lucius:*—I am about to give you the information for which you offered a reward of five hundred pounds some six years ago, but as your enterprise in sending to India for the Heart of God for me has made me very comfortable for life, I will not expect you to pay the five hundred pounds; I would advise you to apply it to the promulgation of intelligence among retired army officers, country gentlemen, and young adventurers. I dropped the Heart of God into the goblet of water I was holding, and it was very funny to see you looking for it when it was so near you. It is a great mistake to think we Eastern people have no sense of humor; I enjoyed this joke much better than you ever will. After leaving your house, I went to Cambridge, having quite sufficient money to establish me creditably at the University. I had ways and means of getting credit upon the Heart of God, which I need not explain. I amused myself much at Cambridge, and spent my vacations in Paris. (You don't go to the best hotels there, or I would